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John J. Lejeune of the U.S. Marines

The USS Kidd and Nautical Center is now the home of a statue of John J. Lejeune that is yet another reason to go downtown and reflect on the proud heritage of this state and nation.

The statue of Lejeune honors the late lieutenant general and commandant of the Marine Corps, a native of Pointe Coupee Parish.

Lejeune was born in 1867 in New Roads, attended LSU and graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy. He joined the Marines, served in World War I and later developed amphibious operations as a high-ranking officer. It made the Marines relevant in modern warfare, and his work paid off for the United States in the memorable battles in the South Pacific in World War II.

He did not live to see final victory in that war. He died in 1942, three years before V-J Day. The Marine training base in North Carolina, Camp Lejeune, is named for him.

The statue honoring Lejeune was donated by New Orleans oilman Pat Taylor, who wanted it to be a reminder of the values instilled by the Corps. "I think the young people will know his legacy, and the message will be you can be what you want to be," Taylor said.

Taylor said although his experience in the Marines was brief, he gained the confidence he needed to graduate from college and own a business. He took platoon and officer's training courses at LSU, but was discharged because of a weak heart.

"They took a scared little kid and made something of him," he said. "Our young people have the intelligence to succeed, but by challenging them, we raise their self-esteem."

Taylor's donation not only helps to repay that personal debt, but it memorializes the great tradition of military leadership in Louisiana and particularly for LSU.

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